

## Finding Proof

[VIDEO LINK](#)

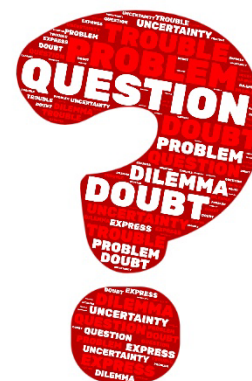
### What is it to prove your family tree and its lineage?



In a criminal court of law, you need to prove someone's guilt beyond a “shadow of a doubt.” Similarly in genealogy, we need to have evidence that after “reasonably exhaustive research,” the evidence points to a solid conclusion. In this process we are weighing the evidence for its validity.

What if it is not that easy? What if we can't say that one person is the father of another person beyond a shadow of doubt? What if there is not enough evidence to give us a solid conclusion? What do we do then?

First, before frustration sets in, let us take a step back. Let's run through a few questions and stepping stones (genealogy checks and balances) to see where you are in your research.



- Do you have a specific Research Question (RQ)?
- Who is your Target Ancestor? A “Target Ancestor” (as I call it) is the person named in the Research Question or family unit you are focused on, no one else.
- Have you searched your own personal archives for records or artifacts that might answer the RQ?
- What are you using for primary research platform (i.e. Ancestry, FamilySearch, MyHeritage, software, etc.)?
- On your primary research platform...
  - Have you searched from the ancestor's profile? (This often autofill's the information in search).
  - Have you searched the Card Catalog by name and one event? (Do not use too many criteria).
  - Have you searched the Card Catalog by location and era?
  - Have you looked at other member trees for clues?
- Have you contacted close family (if possible) to ask about this research question?
- Have you transcribed the records you found?
- Have you abstracted the records you found?
- Have you started individual Research Notes, in chronological order, for each ancestor associated with this research question?
- What is your secondary research platform (if you have one), like Ancestry, FamilySearch etc.



[GenealogyTV.org](http://GenealogyTV.org)



[YouTube.com/GenealogyTV](https://YouTube.com/GenealogyTV)

- On the secondary platform...
  - Have you searched from the ancestor's profile?
  - Have you searched the Card Catalog by name and one event (death, birth, marriage, etc.)?
  - Have you searched the Card Catalog by location and era?
  - Have you looked at other member trees for clues?
- Have you studied the history of the area for when your ancestor lived there?
- Have you looked at the State or Regional Archives?
- Working backwards, have you found evidence of:
  - Death / Burial / Funeral / Probate
  - Residence / City Directories / Census
  - Children?
  - Marriage Certificates / Bonds / Bands / Registries
  - Birth / Certificates / Announcements / Registries
- Have you looked for...
  - Church Records / Bibles / Baptisms / Registries / Cemeteries
  - Military Records / Unit History / Widows Pensions
  - Tax Records / Land / Poll / Agricultural
  - Court Records / Deeds / Wills and or Probate/ Divorce / Civil or Criminal Judgements / Marriage
  - Newspapers / Obituaries / Wedding, Birth, or Death Announcements / Stories / Business Ads
  - All State and Federal Census records for the life of your ancestor



Have you looked offline? There might be more to find in person.

- State Archives
- Local County Libraries
- Museums
- Local Genealogical and Historical Societies

This is just the start of what you can find online and offline. The question is, did you turn over every rock?

Okay, let us say you did look everywhere. Now what? Here are some tips, they really are effective.

- Organize your work.
- Transcribe every document.
- Abstract the details from the transcription into your Research Notes.
- Keep Research Notes in Chronological order, offline. Do not rely on Ancestry to do this for you.

***“Keeping Good Research Notes is the #1 Way to Break Down Brick Walls!”*** Connie Knox

- ❑ Research all close family members to the same degree you did your Target Ancestor.
- ❑ Research the F.A.N. Club (Friends, Associates, and Neighbors) to the same degree you did your ancestor.
- ❑ Keep Research Notes on the immediate family (and FAN Club, if necessary) who is related to the Target Ancestor. Remember, we’re focused on a Research Question.

Once you have found all records you can, now it’s time to correlate that evidence. Do all facts agree? Probably not. So then, is there a logical explanation as to why some facts agree and others don’t?

This is where evidence evaluation really comes into play. Some records are going to carry more weight in your assessment of them. Look at the informant to help decide the strength of the facts. Did they witness the event? If so, that will carry more weight than documents that are copies, or reported, or hearsay evidence.

We call this primary vs. secondary evidence in our evaluation. Secondary evidence is also known as “derivative” evidence. These are things like indexes and copies of records.

Putting all the pieces together sometimes can feel more like solving a Rubik’s cube rather than a one dimensional puzzle. The key is in examining the facts for their value. This will often provide a clearer understanding of why some facts differ.

Sometimes items were created long after the event, so memories may have faded. Copies can introduce errors or typos. The indexing handwriting may be challenging, so the indexer misread the spelling of a name.



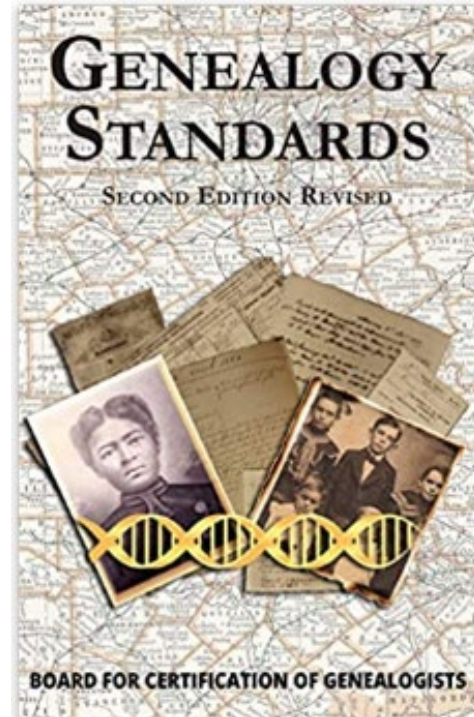
## Genealogical Proof Standards

This is where the Genealogical Proof Standards (GPS) can help. The GPS was developed by what I like to call Genealogy Royalty. These are the folks who really know their stuff.

In short, the GPS is a process that says..

- Do Reasonably Exhaustive Research (I prefer to call it Reasonably Thorough Research).
- Cite Your Sources
- Analyze Your Records
- Correlate Your Evidence (Facts)
- Resolve Conflicts
- Write Your Conclusions<sup>1</sup>

[Affiliate Link to the Genealogy Standards Book on Amazon](#)



## In Conclusion

Use these steps to help you find proof of your ancestors, generation after generation. Focus on one ancestor at a time.

Doing so will help you build a rich family history with tons of details and give you a deeper understanding of those who came before us, what their lives were like, what they experienced, what they saw, military conflicts they may have participated in, the businesses they ran, or the items they owned.

The stories you can find are endless. It is just a matter of you getting out there and discovering them and sharing them with future generations.

### About the Genealogy TV Academy

We talk in greater detail at the [Genealogy TV Academy](#). There are several deep dive lessons (virtually) on each of these components.

<sup>1</sup> Board for Certification of Genealogist, *Genealogy Standards*, 2d ed. (Nashville: Turner Pub., 2019),1-2.